DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 191 761 SO 012 784

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TITLE Comparative Analysis of Policy Making: Politics and Education in Developing Nations.
PUB DATE Apr 80
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Boston, MA, April 7-11, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Comparative Education; Decision Making; *Developing Nations; *Education; Educational Change; Educational Objectives; *Educational Policy; *Educational Research; Educational Trends; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Literature Reviews; Policy Formation; *Political Influences; *Politics; Research Needs

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the relationship between politics and education in developing nations in light of the question: "Under what conditions is educational reform successful?" The objective is to create a framework for investigating educational policies based on outcomes rather than objectives or needs. The author recommends that, in addition to technical and cultural criteria for policy, educational researchers should consider three political dimensions of policy--decision making, implementation, and effects of a given policy on a system's capacity for dealing with inevitable spin-off problems. Review of existing research on the politics of education in developing nations indicates that most researchers have concentrated on a historical-descriptive style of analysis, overemphasized data such as cross-national surveys, and underemphasized comparative case studies, analytical approaches, and research on questions such as the success or failure of particular policies. The conclusion is that major aims of comparative educational policy studies in the 1980s should be to discern regularities in the conditions that shape outcomes, examine specific policies with regard to their effects on society, and analyze conditions and settings which encourage or discourage particular types of education/policy relationships. (DB)

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Comparative Analysis of Policy Making: Politics and Education in Developing Nations

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Inescapably, politics pervades education. So long as education is a valued good in society requiring allocation of scarce collective resources, educational policy will be influenced by political groups, processes, and institutions. By definition, the political arena is characterized by conflict and negotiation rather than by strictly rational planning of means to goals. As a result, content of policy cannot be independent of the characteristics of policy-making and policy-makers. To evaluate policy involves analyzing politics.

Political perspectives on education have enjoyed growing popularity in the past decade. Investigators have concentrated their considerable efforts on the United States, with Europe not far behind as a favorite site for research. Far less is known about Third World countries, though politics is hardly less important for education there than it is in Chicago or Paris. Indeed, given population growth, limited financial resources, and disillusionment with the effects of past policies, one could argue that the greatest need for analysis of the relationship of policy-making to policy outcomes is precisely in developing nations.

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Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Boston, Massachusetts, April 7-11, 1980)

Unfortunately the study of educational politics in developing nations has not attained unity, theory, or a threshold of generalization. Those informative and penetrating studies that have been published were undertaken with different concerns in mind or from different disciplinary perspectives. In the absence of general frameworks and common questions, comparisons of their findings are tentative at best and easily misleading. In the following pages, I lay out a set of concerns that can be used to draw together work already completed and to guide future research on educational politics in developing nations.

I have organized this framework around the question: "Under what conditions is educational reform successful?" This question has obvious implications for the practitioner, but I pose it more for its heuristic value. It directs attention to a conditional level of analysis, it focuses on self-conscious attempts at planned change, and it specifies that process cannot be evaluated without attention to outcomes. While this is hardly the only question that can generate a comparative framework - it would also be fruitful to examine the absence of reform, for example - I would argue that it is a logical and useful place to begin.

Analysis of conditions

Students of the politics of education in developing nations have thrived on a historical-descriptive style of analysis, narrating and explaining what happened in a particular situation. Such analysis is a solid first step on which to build an understanding of relationships among actors, processes, structures, and outcomes. These studies can help researchers choose which political factors have had a bearing on policy, in real situa-

ations rather than leaving such choice to more arbitrary criteria. The aim of comparative educational policy studies in the 1980s ought to be to discern regularities in the conditions that shape outcomes - both policy "outputs" and the effects of these policies on society. This "conditional analysis" would attempt to describe settings in which certain events do or do not occur, without necessarily claiming to have found causation.

A handful of hundred-nation, multivariate studies have correlated social, economic and political factors with educational policy. Using a large battery of indicators, Verner repeated others' findings that socio-economic variables seemed more highly correlated with educational policy than were political factors. Clark found political factors more important on distributional policies, but relationships were weak and her variables problematic. Ramirez and Rubinson came up with the unsurprising result that the more centralized and relatively dominant the government is in society, the more centralized education will be. Meyer et al., seemingly criticize the entire enterprise by demonstrating that neither socio-economic nor political dimensions of modernization explained much educational expansion beyond that described by a contagion model.

Such cross-national surveys are particularly useful in conveying a sense of universal constraints on policy - particularly the obvious limits that economic resources put on educational expenditures. But they are trapped by the variables available to them, particularly the quality of political indicators. Without repeating the list of well-known criticisms of such data, let me only note that readily available variables do not necessarily represent the political factors which case studies indicate are

most powerful in shaping policy. Many of the political variables used in multivariate analysis are either insensitive to national variations or meaningless. To say that parliamentary regimes do not all produce the same educational policy is neither interesting nor surprising. But this should not be taken to mean that politics is therefore irrelevant. At this stage I suspect that parallel case studies will yield a clearer understanding of the political process and its effects.

Reform

Studying reform - planned change ostensibly directed at specified goals - centers attention on attempts at redirecting educational outcomes. Reforms have special interest to a policy-analyst because they represent attempts to re-evaluate the past, redefine problems or reallocate costs and benefits. Reform is distinguished from regular, repeated decisions, such as elaboration of annual budgets for ongoing operations. The latter "routine" (though not apolitical) activities do impinge on the development of reforms, but a focus on reform brings political processes and constraints into sharper relief. Studies of educational change in revolutionary settings - China, the Soviet Union, Cuba, Tanzania and others - are obvious cases where study of attempted change may reveal constraints and interests that can prevail even with when the political will to change is very strong. (Shirk, Whyte) Finally, although a reform may be conceived as producing bold results, it may be carried out incrementally. This incrementalism is not necessarily a judgment on the success of the changes; an incremental strategy may be required for adoption of changes throughout the system.

Success

Success and failure are loaded terms, but this does not mean that they ought to be avoided by serious scholars. Consideration of "success" requires sorting out different meanings of the term, each of which may direct research to a different set of problems. In the following pages, I propose four aspects of success and develop the separate but related research questions that they imply. My purpose is not simply to generate a new list of questions, but to demonstrate that these questions are related to one another in ways that may provide a much needed framework for comparison and analysis.

Success encompasses 4 levels of results:

1) Successful for whom? What are the competing, conflicting, and coexisting interests that impinge on educational policy and how do they enter the policy-making process?

2) If carried out accurately, would a reform produce anticipated results? Is the strategy technically sound and appropriate to the culture?

3) Is the program implemented as designed? Compliance and correct understanding of policy cannct be assumed; it is often at this level that reforms fail.

4) Does the change produce other significant outcomes and how are these dealt with? A reform ought to be judged not only in isolation, but also by the degree to which the system can cope with its broader consequences. My specific concern is whether a given policy improves or hampers a system's capacity to deal with inevitable spin-off problems.

1) Successful for whom?

From a practitioner's point of view, outcomes of policy cannot be divorced from their origins; from the analyst's perspective, the two should not be separated, but often are. Knowing who set the agenda, who proposed a policy, how it was contested, and whom the program seems to threaten often helps explain both content of a policy and variations in commitment of resources and energy to its achievement.

Graham Allison (Allison, Peterson) argued quite persuasively that one's analytic perspective influences his/her conclusions. By definition, an analytic approach defines relevant and irrelevant categories of evidence. A rational policy-making perspective assumes decision-making to be essentially a process of setting and ranking goals, perceiving and defining problems, searching for and evaluating relevant information, then choosing the policy that best fits the goals. A researcher working with this mental picture of the process would focus on reconstructing the calculus of decision-makers. In evaluating a proliferation of technical institutes, for example, one would look for probable goals - accommodation of students, manpower needs - rather than clash between ministries. This approach is not "wrong" but it is incomplete. A working hypothesis of rationality helps isolate issues and information that play a role in the evolution of policy. Moreover this perspective does not require sensitive or inside information, so is often a good place to start when evidence is sparse. Nonetheless, its assumptions limit its explanatory power, and the model fits some situations much more accurately than others. If one used this approach exclusively in studying policy-making, many outcomes would seem puzzling,

poorly informed, or irrational. What manageable perspective on policy-making would help?

One powerful limitation on the rational model described by Allison is its assumption that actors that share a common set of goals. This unity of goals ought to be investigated, not assumed. As a first step one needs to discover who participates in policy-making, what their interests are, and what is meant by participation. Obviously, different actors bring different perceptions of problems and their own self-interests to bear on policy-making, and they have different resources to back their stands. As a result, a policy may not be the best choice to reach predetermined goals, but, in the absence of agreed-upon goals, the policy may simply be the lowest common denominator. It is often a compromise among interests rather than a "solution." This analytical perspective attributes partial rationality to individual actors, but not to the overall process. As a research strategy it directs one's attention to disparate interests and how they may be reflected in choices.

In this perspective, the concept of demand clearly has a political side not always evident when the term is used in an economic sense. "Demand" summarizes direct actions by individuals to capture goods - parents sending their children to already-overcrowded schools - and articulation of requests directed at responsible authorities. This second sense of demand requires a series of steps not available equally to everyone in society. Expressing vague feelings of need as concrete wants, and transmission of them to proper authorities requires availability of and familiarity with channels, power resources, access, and attention from policy-makers. Groups differ not just in their interests, but in their abilities

to tap this process, to be accepted by others or to force others to pay attention. They enjoy varying levels of success in making their views prevail and even in getting their problems onto the political agenda. (Bachrach and Baretz) Where some groups lack political vocabulary, skills, or access, third parties may attempt to interpret their needs and speak for them. Accuracy of interpretation varies tremendously by case. Where programs are meant to serve needs of inarticulate or excluded groups such inaccuracies may explain the difference between success and failure.

What we describe as the "decision-making process" is often a combination of decision-making (rational or incremental) and procedure-making. In other words, those involved in the process may be attempting to solve problems and deal with other actors simultaneously. As a result some choices really grow more out of shifting relationships between actors than from competition over the substance of the issue. For example, one relationship among actors is negotiation. But this is a special case of more general maneuvering around who has authority and influence over different policy "territories." In bargaining, certain groups have already established de facto rights to participate. But there are other relationships among interested actors: granting groups token participation; freezing out others and denying them alternative access to the agenda; trying to anticipate others' wants; claiming that one has anticipated others' needs. Stated in general terms, not only do different actors have different interests and concerns, they also have different amounts or points of access which also affect outcome. We may find in a few situations that more or less unified, rational actors do dominate policy-making (perhaps by keeping others out), but elsewhere their plans are ignored and abandoned by others. (McGinn et al.)

The concept of policy "territory" can be especially helpful in disaggregating our view of foreign governments. For example, in some nations, ministries of labor or industry establish their own post-secondary technical institutes largely because they cannot exert sufficient leverage over ministry of education programs. The resulting mixture of institutions may overlap wastefully, and not constitute a "rational" response to manpower needs, because it is the outcome of competition among government groups for authority, control, and autonomy.

In such a setting, technical "experts" are often treated as a group among other groups, not as those who have the correct answers. Their expertise is a resource that they can use to try to influence the development of policy, but they are rarely in full control of the decision process. Their ability to play the game affects the likelihood of getting a reasonable approximation of their ideas adopted and implemented. (Benveniste) Because of the gap between experts' anticipation of their roles based on their expertise, and their real roles determined by the political context, many highly trained technocrats become frustrated at the refusal of their governments to "listen to reason."

Study of policy-making in the senses sketched above is essential to understanding conditions of success and failure. In particular, some options prevail not because they are "best" in an objective sense, but because they are in the perceived interests of some participants or because they represent a compromise among competing interests. Other options are excluded because they conflict with the interests of some groups or because certain groups do not have access to the process for reasons unrelated to

the policy under study. These biases in policy-making go far beyond problems of limited information or limited information-processing capacity. One would expect that cross-national variations in the level at which educational policy-making occurs, in officially sanctioned means of participation, or in the nature of relevant political resources would affect who participates and how their participation is valued. As a second step, one should evaluate how variation in participants affects policy choices. Relating process to choices is interesting not only in itself, but also for its bearing on outcomes. How policy is made may shape first, how close a policy is to some ideal technical solution, and second, what its chances are for correct implementation. Both of these senses of success will be discussed in the following sections.

2) Appropriateness of strategy

Perhaps the first question that comes to mind in evaluating performance of a given policy is whether the solution fits the problem. This question has both technical and cultural levels. First, is the theory connecting problem, solution, and effect accurate? Does it take into account the delicate structure within which a program must operate? For example, there is some question whether elementary school pupils and teachers will pay much attention to new manual work exercises unless that material is tested on secondary school entrance exams. Second, are these theoretical links valid in the specific cultural conditions? Alternately, are there features built into the program to encourage sensitivity to cultural differences and to allow sufficient flexibility for adaptation to these differences. Cultural gaps may arise not only when reforms are imported from abroad, but even when "urban" reforms are applied to rural areas, or when a program is transferred from one region to another. The complexity of this

cultural problem derives from the richness and complexity of cultures as well as from uncertainties and confusion during periods of social transformation or decay. In developing nations, analysis and anticipation of differences is made more difficult by an overlay of foreign culture on indigenous social institutions. As a result, a school system may resemble European systems but operate in subtly different ways. Equally, officials' facility with European languages may mask important differences in thinking. I mention these points because of their importance for evaluating success, but leave it to another panelist to explore them in detail.

Links between problem and ideal solution may be "disturbed" by the political processes described in the preceding section. In addition to those political constraints, links between problem, program, and product, are complicated by hidden agendas in policy-making. The stated goals of a program may not always be the most important ones for some policy-makers. I am not referring to unintended consequences, but to desired aims which for one reason or another are not expressed publically. A university-level reform to channel more students into practical fields may be justified by reference to manpower needs, while those in charge also hope to reduce the number of students in politically volatile faculties. To puzzle over distortions in achievement of public goals without exploring unpublished intentions is indeed to be caught in a Platonic shadow play. One need not go as far as Carnoy, Bowles and Gintis to make this argument. I am certainly not arguing that every action must result from a conscious, if concealed, plan. Only that researchers should remain sensitive to the possibility that not all goals appear in print.

3) Implementation

To study implementation is to study the relationship among the parts of a polity - how instructions are framed and communicated and the degree of autonomy individual actors enjoy to interpret, ignore, or expand their instructions. Actual policy, after all, is more (or less) than a set of regulations and guidelines issued by policy-making bodies. It depends on actions by individuals located throughout society - both civil servants, party politicians, local influentials and private citizens. Compliance and cooperation by all these groups do not necessarily follow automatically from the issuance of regulations. Therefore, it matters very much whether individuals cooperate, ignore or subvert programs. And it becomes a primary task of government to mobilize their cooperation as cheaply as possible. In order to investigate conditions of success, at this point we inquire about conditions of failure. Failures in implementation may result from unintentional and intentional distortions of the proposed policy.

Avoiding unintentional distortion - where a person thinks he is acting as directed, but isn't - is often seen to be a purely administrative problem. Discussions on avoiding distortion recommend lucid formulation of goals and clear communication of instructions throughout the administration along with provision of sufficient resources. But the problem is more than one of clear information - though that is often a serious concern. Unintentional distortion is a matter of both politics and administration.

Policies do not unfold in a vacuum, but in the context of competing programs and goals. This competition may offer individuals a variety of

incentives which may or may not correspond to the agenda of any one program. In the civil service or political organizations there are structural and concrete dimensions to incentives: accountability and rewards. How and by whom individuals expect to be judged shapes the types of cues they are most responsive to. Hierarchical, centralized bureaucracies are frequently unresponsive to local populations since individual agents are not judged by that local group. Closely-supervised agents have less autonomy to respond to local requests, even if they would like to. Concrete rewards - bonuses, promotions, transfers - may be used to guide agents' choices of which programs to encourage, but can inadvertently lead to de-emphasizing programs which, for a variety of reasons unrelated to their importance, do not offer direct rewards. Finally, but one's personal satisfaction or peer evaluation may shape job performance but in an unsystematic manner. Speaking of American school systems, Pincus observed that the incentives on those who choose innovations may be different from the incentives on those who must implement them. This may explain some of the slippage between stages.

Likewise, even if goals are specified clearly, the form in which they are expressed influences how programs will be carried out. It is usually hypothesized that any given reform will bring a chain of beneficial effects. Monitoring progress may focus on only one goal, often the easiest to measure directly, and other benefits are assumed to follow naturally in its wake. There is not always even an analytic scheme to describe the purported relationship among goals/benefits. Without question, it is important to measure and monitor results and to choose types of data that are reasonably easy to collect. But such measures may introduce predictable distortions into the operations of a program, and analysts should investigate

such sources of systematic bias. To illustrate, implementation may be evaluated by conformity to certain procedures and/or by achievement of specified results. Either method is supposed to ensure accurate performance, and each may introduce its own pattern of distortion. Programs requiring uniform implementation may guide agents to what are, on the whole, the best means to a given end and to prevent them from subverting the targets. In doing so, strict guidelines limit the capacity of individuals to try to adapt policies to local conditions, although absence of flexibility may frustrate achievement of basic goals. On the other hand, programs that evaluate measurable results inevitably focus attention on some goals to the detriment of other hypothesized benefits. Unfortunately, easily measured outcomes (rising enrollments) do not always act as good proxies for the more important goals (rising learning), although they do provide a familiar bureaucratic defense against criticism (e.g., targets are being met, therefore, complaints are irrelevant).

Leaving the "benign" cases aside, we turn to intentional distortion of policy which may occur when an actor does not agree with the aims of the policy, with the ordering of priorities, or with the means selected. This distortion can show up in the form of ritual conformity - adoption of the appearance of change without the substance. Such masquerades occur on domestic policy or with reference to programs initiated by foreign organizations. In both cases, latitude for deviation depends on direction of accountability and degree of supervision, and reflects both personal judgment and informal political factors. One would expect to find both intentional and unintentional distortions where policy was the result of compromise or where some interested groups were excluded from policy-making.

For many people in developing nations, the terms in which Western analysts conceptualize political participation are marginally important at best. Truly competitive elections - the anchor of most participation literature - are far from universal. Even in Western democratic states, leading students of political participation have observed that a vote is a very blunt instrument for communicating specific policy preferences. (Verba, Nie, and Kim) It is safe to suggest that most people do not attempt to influence directly broad lines of policy. Rather they are more realistic and aim at accommodating specific programs to their self-perceived needs. Channels for such participation include face-to-face relationships, bargaining with representatives of political and administrative authority, and patron-client relations, as opposed to the more classic measures of voting, campaigning, running for office, or writing a letter to some unknown official in the capital. The archetypical political act may not be voting but rather pleading with a school principal to retain one's over-age son in school. Even though an official may not be accountable directly to the people he serves, he must live with them on a daily basis. Because of proximity, personal ties, or natural sympathy, even a non-elected official may find himself adjusting central directions to local requests, no one of which has a discernible effect on overall results, but which cumulatively may produce significant deviations from the expected. Not only does this observation suggest why and how policies will be distorted during implementation, but also prompts one to inquire whether those with the greatest resources and access may bias outcomes systematically at this level as well. (This pattern may not mean that policy should be en-

forced at all costs - in fact, it may indicate that there is a need for more responsive structures at the local level.) (See Cowan on educational finance in Kenya)

Implementation problems may be examined from another perspective as well: the availability of alternatives for individuals and groups to achieve their aims outside the structure of government services. To approach this topic we return to the idea that implementation of policy depends not only on the rules and procedures laid down by policy-makers, but also on the correct acts of individual administrators within the system and of thousands of citizens acting independently. Much of governing is directed at achieving their cooperation at the lowest cost possible. At least over the short term that cost appears to be reduced where the government monopolizes provision of benefits desired by citizens. American experience indicates that private schools have complicated integration of public schools - that is, until the government extends regulation to cover private schools as well. Elsewhere, attempts to track more students to vocational fields may be stymied if parents can send their children to academic tracks of private schools. For certain types of reforms, monopoly eases compliance. In Tunisia, I found that the government's ability to impose a tracking system at the university was facilitated by the fact that most students had no alternative to public education; in case of an unfavorable decision, the best they could hope for was an individually-negotiated adjustment. By contrast, government requirements that businessmen use public employment offices to fill vacancies were neither enforceable nor effective. Because businessmen could find employees easily outside official channels - the government held no real monopoly over the benefit

desired - after several years, the Labor Department began to search to incentives to attract compliance. In effect, this policy had to be reformulated to take into account the autonomy of key actors.

Imposition of such a monopoly is not without its own costs: it may contradict other values and it may be politically and financially expensive. A lack of monopoly may offer its own benefits - for the time being the Harambee schools in Kenya seem to act as a political safety valve. Finally, monopoly may make noncompliance more difficult without eliminating the problem altogether; indeed, reaction to an unpopular policy may then have to be expressed as general hostility. Still the apparent attractiveness of control helps explain governmental attempts to monopolize or regulate sectors of activity, even if those efforts are sporadic and not fully effective. Attempts to improve implementation and compliance may be expressed not only in terms of better information and communications, but also structurally - imposing greater control despite the costs of doing so. Whether tighter implementation will improve results is an open question, related to the issues raised in the previous sections.

I have concentrated my discussion of implementation on problems of cooperation and compliance. Where success requires accurate implementation then conditions that affect how individuals understand and react to policy ought to be included in our consideration of successful reform. Accurate information is only one such condition. Even the best communications lines may not be able to overcome contrary effects of incentives, or program targets. Equally, even where administrators try to carry out a program in accordance with instructions they may need independent cooperation from citizens. Here awareness of local patterns of participation and availability

of alternatives can contribute to understanding citizen reaction. Analysis of implementation is inextricably tied to analysis of policy making in two ways. First, the way in which policy is made may create or avert certain characteristic problems in implementation. Second, even when policy is "set" it is rarely settled. Problems in implementation may lead to reconsideration of plans and renegotiation of interests.

4) Dealing with consequences

Even the best-conceived policy, much less a politically-negotiated one, will have unanticipated consequences. It is probably inevitable that any given social policy will generate new problems, even as it succeeds in resolving old issues. In that case, it would be wise to try to anticipate and monitor far-reaching consequences of any program. But it would be foolish to expect to eliminate them. Instead, it is necessary to turn attention to how a given policy affects a government's (or other groups') capacity to deal with spin-off problems. Such capacity may be evaluated by examining a given policy's effect on group alignments, on perceptions, on resources, and on information-collecting capacity.

My thinking on this problem is still at a preliminary stage, so what follows will be sketchy but, I hope, suggestive. A policy may influence the alignment of groups by creating vested interests with a stake in the continuation of a program even when that program's rationale has disappeared. The best examples of this are often found within bureaucracies; if a separate agency is formed to implement a program, that bureau may resist attempts to phase out the policy or to change the bureau's mission. On the other hand, a policy may create groups that press for change going beyond the

original reform. Mass primary education has spurred groups of parents to press for expansion of access to secondary school. In both cases, one ought to observe the location, resources, identity, and size of such groups. On a more abstract level, policies may have broad positive or negative effects on citizen support for the government in general and their willingness to comply with directives issued in the name of the nation. For example, it is known that some policy disasters increase citizen distrust of the government's intentions, even on totally unrelated issues.

Second, a policy may block or facilitate new perceptions of existing or evolving problems. A program that works in 75% of the cases, may block perceptions of internal weaknesses which account for failure in the other 25%. Resolution of a problem, however, may make a different problem look like a new priority and focus attention in that direction.

Third, public policies affect the amount of resources and available and required for future programs. Rapid expansion of primary schooling was criticized in some circles for draining resources away from more immediately productive investments while burdening the State with fixed regular costs. Other policies may create new "needs" that are so expensive as to be unsatisfiable - mass higher education, for example. A policy may also create structural constraints on future options. Dore and others have observed that the content of national exams influences what is taught in school. It is difficult to introduce new subject material without rewriting the exam format, and difficult to make curricula more sensitive to local needs without changing the role of national exams altogether. Yet, as Pincus has observed, structural and organizational reforms are often the hardest to carry out effectively.

Fourth, reforms may increase or decrease capacity to gather essential information. Information collection channels developed for one program may prove useful for others. Expansion of some forms of scientific education may increase the number and quality of people trained to collect and analyze data. If scientifically collected and analyzed data proves useful in one circumstance, it may lead politicians to give it higher priority in the future. (The opposite can also be true, however.) Finally, results of both substantive programs and information-gathering exercises may affect citizens' willingness to supply the government with other sorts of attitudinal or behavioral information necessary for effective evaluation of programs.

Conclusion

Each of the foregoing dimensions of success encompasses a complex set of problems. What I have tried to do in bringing them together is to demonstrate how different levels of success impinge on one another. To evaluate conditions under which reforms succeed or fail, therefore, involves looking beyond the observation that a given proposal was subverted by political forces or proved incompatible with some vague "political reality." I have tried to illustrate in a systematic fashion some of the varieties of political reality that bear on both planning and implementation. In the final section, I have also argued that we ought to broaden the definition of success to include consideration of a program's impact on capacity to deal with outcomes. One can never hope to anticipate all intended and unintended consequences, only to understand how an unfolding policy will shape and constrain later politics, perceptions, resources, and information.

Chicago, March 1980.

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